

Feb. 26, 2009

AFA Panel: "Air Operations in Afghanistan"
Air Warfare Symposium, Orlando, Fla.

By Lt. Gen. Donald Wurster

During the panel discussion, "Air Operations in Afghanistan," we discussed the importance of Phase 0, Shaping Operations. I challenged the audience to consider what actions the Air Force would have taken if our leadership had known five years in advance about the attacks our adversaries were planning in September 2001, in order to prevent or preempt them. With that background, we highlighted an open-source report of an evolving biological threat and a National Intelligence Estimate that warns of a "more likely than not" weapons of mass destruction attack by 2013. The question this presents to us as an Air Force is, "What should the Air Force do now to prevent or preempt this potential future attack?"

The December 2008 Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism report says, "The commission believes that unless the world community acts decisively and with great urgency, it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013. The Commission further believes that terrorists are more likely to be able to obtain and use a biological weapon than a nuclear weapon. The Commission believes that the U.S. government needs to move more aggressively to limit the proliferation of biological weapons and reduce the prospect of a bioterror attack." This report is available at http://www.cfr.org/publication/17910/world_at_risk.html.

The 2007 National Intelligence Estimate also says, "We assess that al-Qa'ida will continue to try to acquire and employ chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear material in attacks and would not hesitate to use them if it develops what it deems is sufficient capability." The 2007 NIE is available at <http://www.dni.gov/reports.htm>.

During the discussion, I also spoke of recent open-source reports of Al Qaeda experimenting with bubonic plague in Northern Africa. Only last month in January 2009, press reports described a biological incident that killed at least 40 al Qaeda operatives in eastern Algeria. Experts claim the group was developing biological weapons for use against Western cities. This report by the British's Telegraph newspaper is available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/algeria/4294664/Al-Qaeda-cell-killed-by-Black-Death-was-developing-biological-weapons.html>.

Since the role of our military forces is to interpose ourselves between the threat and our citizenry, the key decision is, "How do we field and employ adequate and effective elements of Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power that will make a difference to this credible and imminent threat." It is our job to do so. We have solid intelligence and evidence Al Qaeda is planning WMD events, but we are struggling with how to balance our force and investment to defend against these non-conventional attacks. We need to preclude the next Afghanistan, prevent the next terrorist attack, and figure out how to put the capabilities of airpower between our nation and the adversary. We must consider the importance of building needed and effective capacity in Phase 0 in the ungoverned areas of the world where our enemy will seek to establish

safe havens. We need to be aware of the critical difference between effectiveness and efficiency when it comes to employment of assets. We need active and targeted partnership activity including the employment of light air mobility in key countries like Mali, Mauritania, Afghanistan, the Philippines and in South America to produce effects that will affect these outcomes, with the Air Force as a key member of the joint team. History proves the dramatic difference a few well-trained Airmen can have in an irregular environment. Success in this irregular environment does not take a lot of investment, but it takes more than zero.